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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine if participation in a pre-first grade transactional program would be more effective than grade repetition in enhancing first grade readiness. The transition program emphasized the acquisition of academic and behavioral skills necessary for a successful first grade experience. Students in the program were trained to sit at desks for increasing periods of time, work independently of the teacher, listen to and follow directions, and copy from the board. Reading instruction stressed visual and auditory discrimination of letters and sounds, letter-sound associations, and other readiness skills. The Language Experience in Reading and Peabody Language Kits were also used in the program. The design of the study was an ex post facto comparison of two groups. Transition repeater students were compared to nontransition repeaters at the end of their second first grade year on standardized reading and language achievement tests and on reading levels in the Holt series. Results indicated no significant difference in scores of the two groups on the reading and language tests. Teacher ratings of student performance also showed no significant differences in the two groups. (FL)

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Volume 17 Summer 1983 Number 1

A Study of the Effects of a Pre-First Grade Transitional Class as Compared with First Grade Retention on Reading Achievement

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F.E.R.D.C. Notes on This Bulletin

Educators have always sought ways and means to address individual differences in children while having to teach groups of children in a graded organization, which assumes that all children are functioning at a relatively similar rate. Educators are also sensitive to the documented proof that fear of failing produces harsh stress and that failure at an early age does damage to one's self concept.

Apparently the public policymakers believe that acquisition of knowledge and early development of skills are more important than the psyche, or may be necessary to develop the psyche. In any event, educators are on the horns of a dilemma. How can you satisfy public policy and satisfy your professional knowledge of child development and good mental health at the same time? The author of this research has attempted to look at alternative ways to address immaturity among learners of the same age group by comparing the performance of students in transitional classes to those who have failed and have repeated the grade. While the study shows no significant differences, one must remember that only cognitive measures were used. One could conclude that if transitional students do as well as repeaters, then why have repeaters at all?

The research completed by Ms. Zinski is timely and thought-provoking and F.E.R.D.C. believes it is worthy enough to be read by the supporters of that organization.

Charlie T. Council
Executive Secretary

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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

American schools have been organized in a graded structure since the mid-1800's (Ayres, 1909). The major assumption underlying the adoption of this system was that knowledge can be compartmentalized into a series of hierarchical skills that any child could realistically be expected to master in a given year (Anderson & Ritsher, 1969). This principle translated into the theory of grade standards which required every child to assimilate a specified amount of knowledge before he/she can be promoted to the next grade (Caswell & Forshay, 1957).

The expectations of the graded system presented the problem of what to do when a child has not mastered the criterion skill development for a designated grade (Cook & Clymer, 1962). Grade retention (or non-promotion) was soon adopted and remains the universal intervention strategy for dealing with below grade level achievement.

Retention is the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade for a full year to remain at that level for the next school year (Jackson, 1975). The literature on the effectiveness of retention as an academic intervention strategy suggests that there is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with academic or adjustment difficulties (Jackson, 1975). In fact, some evidence indicates retention in the first grade is not only ineffective but can result in deleterious effects on academic performance (Dobbs & Neville, 1967). Retention, to date, remains an unproven strategy for dealing with the problem of grade readiness.

One alternative to simple grade repetition for youngsters with academic difficulties has been the transitional program. This

program is designed for first grade youngsters who have not demonstrated a firm grasp of those skills considered prerequisite for successful performance in a first grade curriculum. The rationale that underlies the transitional class concept draws heavily from the developmental theory of Arnold Gesell (1928). Gesel, a leader in the area of early childhood development, purports that human beings, beginning at infancy, advance through several developmental stages (Ames, Gillespie, Haines, & Ilg, 1979). These stages, however, are not dictated solely by chronological age. The developmental growth pattern can differ dramatically from person to person, and each developmental stage dictates an individual's readiness to successfully attempt certain tasks (Ilg & Ames, 1978). Gesellians believe that it is futile to expose a child to tasks that are above his/her developmental level and that a child should be held back from such tasks until he/she attains the appropriate stage of readiness. This might necessitate two or three levels of schooling before entrance into a regular first grade class. Gesell suggested that either a pre-first grade program should be offered to these children or that they should be retained in first grade (or any other grade) until they are developmentally ready to progress (Ilg & Ames, 1978). With the questionable effectiveness of retention as a strategy for academic difficulty, an empirical investigation into the alternative of transitional classes would appear warranted.

Transitional first grade programs have been instituted in several school districts throughout the country as an alternative to simply repeating of the same grade. Research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs. Hillsborough County, Florida, has developed a transitional first grade curriculum in several elementary schools. The problem addressed in this study is whether participation in a transitional curriculum prior to first grade is more effective in enhancing reading development than traditional grade repetition.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses to be investigated in this study are:

1. Students who are placed in a full year transition program before spending a year in a regular first grade program will not be significantly different in reading achievement as measured by the CTBS and Holt Reading Series than those students who simply repeat the first grade.

2. Students who are placed in a full year transition program before spending a year in a regular first grade program will not be significantly different in language achievement as measured by the CTBS than those students who simply repeat the first grade.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

In order to establish a common basis of understanding, for the study, the following definitions of terms are provided.

1. Transitional Program—an alternative educational program for youngsters who do not meet the minimum entry academic requirements for first grade. The purpose is to provide an appropriate program for children entering first grade who need an extended time to develop skills necessary for their successful integration into a formal first grade class. These children are considered to be "at risk" for first grade retention and are identified for placement in the transitional class at the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade. In an effort to ensure student success when he/she meets the formal first grade program, an integrated, carefully designed program for development of learning skills is necessary. Stress then will be placed on developmental, diagnostic-prescriptive aspects, on language development, small group instruction (three to five students) and maximum student-adult interaction. If a transitional student should develop skills which would allow him/her to function comfortably in a first grade unit, the option is open to transfer this student into the regular

first grade. The majority of the students identified for the transitional classes, however, may require an additional year in the first grade. After the transitional year, these students are dispersed throughout the regular first grade classes.

2. "At risk is defined as those children who, because of problems of development and/or experience, are least able to meet the expectations of the school unless the teaching/learning expectations are modified or changed (Zeitlin, 1976). The child for whom this program is designed is often at a developmental level which precedes the ability to be successful with paper and pencil readiness activities.

3. Transitional School—an elementary school that offers the transitional program.

4. Transitional Student—a child who has spent the 1980-81 school year in a transitional classroom and the subsequent 1981-82 school year in a regular first grade program.

5. Non-Transitional School—an elementary school which does not offer the transitional program for students identified as being at risk for first grade retention. In non-transitional school, these students are placed on preventive strategies, in accordance with the Primary Education Program (PREP), and left in the regular classroom.

6. Non-Transitional Student—a child who has spent the 1980-81 school year in a regular first grade program and the 1981-82 school year repeating his/her first grade year.

7. Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)—standardized norm referenced test used to assess reading, language and mathematical skills in Hillsborough County Public Schools.

8. Holt Reading Series—basal reading program published by Holt that is used in Hillsborough County elementary schools.

The transitional program is viewed as an alternative to first grade retention. Both transitional and non-transitional students theoretically repeat first grade. The transitional students, however, are offered a different treatment during the first year. The independent variable in this study is placement in a transitional first grade program for the 1980-81 school year. The dependent variable is performance on the CTBS total reading and total language subtests and reading level in the Holt Series at the end of the 1981-82 school year.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature related to this study will be organized in the following manner:

1. A categorization and analysis of the basic types of research used in investigating the effectiveness of non-promotion.
2. An analysis of the findings of this research on non-promotion related to the basic reasons that motivate teachers to use non-promotion as an intervention strategy.
3. An examination of developmental readiness programs as an alternative to first grade non-promotion.

This review will investigate the questionable effectiveness of non-promotion as an academic intervention strategy. A developmental readiness program will be examined as a viable alternative to deal with the problem of below grade level achievement.

Basic Research Designs in Studying Non-Promotion

The effectiveness of non-promotion as a strategy for enhancing school achievement has been a concern in education since the early 1900's. Major investigations of retention (at that time termed retardation) were conducted by Ayres (1909) and Thorndike (1908). Ayres and Thorndike reported that in our nation's schools, at that time, about one-sixth of children enrolled had been retained at least once and were considered retarded. These high prevalence rates instigated further investigations into the effects of non-promotion on grade level performance. Before one can interpret the findings of this research, it is necessary to understand the limitations of the majority of the investigations into non-promotion. These limitations were outlined by Jackson (1975) in an extensive review of the research on grade retention. He categorizes the studies done on this topic since 1911 into three basic types.

Design Type I compared the achievement and social adjustment of students retained under normal school policies with those promoted under normal policy. Attempts were made to match the students by age, grade level, sex, grades, IQ, achievement test scores and socioeconomic status. After reviewing 204 analyses of data in 17 studies, Jackson found 50 statistically significant results. In terms of achievement, 24 analyses supported promoted students as compared with only 2 favoring the retained pupils. For social adjustment, 23 analyses indicated significant gains for the promoted students while only 3 supported gains for the retainees. The primary problem with these studies was that they were biased towards showing benefits from grade promotion, since some students were retained while others were promoted under normal policies, indicating that the severity of the problems was probably greater for those retained (Jackson, 1975).

Design Type II compared the condition of retained students before and after retention. Jackson found that analyses of 12 studies indicated 1 loss and 92 statistically significant gains in achievement and social adjustment by students after retention. Thus, these studies suggested that retention generally improved students' social adjustment and achievement. However, the design bias here favors grade retention since no comparison group is used and there is no control for improvement due to factors other than retention. Jackson cited this design as being the most invalid of the three types. He pointed out that normal growth and maturation or regression effects were likely to cause some increase in social adjustment and achievement over a given period of time. With no comparison group, it was difficult to determine whether this growth was significant. Consequently, not only does this design fail to evaluate the benefits of retention relative to those of promotion, but it is not adequate even for assessing the benefits of grade retention. "One who uses this design might conclude that even students who are not having difficulties in school would benefit from grade retention!" (Jackson, 1975, p. 623).

Design Type III involved an experimental comparison of

students with difficulties in school who were randomly promoted or retained. Only three studies of this type were conducted, the last one being done at least 40 years ago. No experimental research has been conducted since. The three experimental designs (Cook, 1941; Farley, 1936; Klene & Branson, 1929) involved primary and intermediate students and looked at achievement gains over a 1-semester or 6-month period. Data analysis revealed 18 differences in achievement, only 1 of which was significant, favoring promoted students and 22 non-significant differences favoring retained pupils. These results do not lend support to either course of action. The one statistically significant result came in Farley's (1936) study. Although he found no differences in achievement between fourth and fifth graders who were retained or promoted, he did find significantly greater gains in reading for second and third graders who were promoted rather than retained. Type III is the only unbiased design type. Unfortunately, there were inadequacies in the aforementioned experimental studies. These studies did not include representative samples of students and all three concentrated on only the short-term effects of grade retention (Jackson, 1975).

To summarize Jackson's review, there have been inherent biases in the majority of studies conducted on retention. No experimental research has been attempted since Cook's study in 1941. It is interesting to note that in Klene and Branson's (1929) experimental design, targeted retainees were randomly assigned to promoted and retained groups without parental knowledge or consent (Klene & Granson, 1929). Obviously, such a design is difficult to implement today. Hence, the majority of studies conducted since that time have understandably been confined to quasi-experimental, ex post facto and descriptive research. The remaining studies to be discussed will be examples of Design Types I and II. Any findings reported by such investigation must be interpreted with consideration of the compromises to the internal validity of the research.

Literature Related to Basic Reasons for Non-Promotion

Bocks (1977) reported that there are basically four main underlying reasons that teachers use to justify non-promotion. These are as follows:

1. Non-promotion makes instruction easier by having all children more equal in achievement.
2. Threat of non-promotion motivates students to work harder.
3. Non-promotion allows students to achieve grade standards and master expected subject matter.
4. Non-promotion for reasons of social immaturity allows the child to fit in better with his/her peers.

The research related to each reason listed will be examined.

The first reason to be addressed is the assumed reduction in variability within grade levels as a result of retention. Caswell (1933) did not observe differences in the range of achievement between schools with high and low rates of promotion. Akridge (1937), likewise, observed that non-promotion did not reduce variability in achievement within a grade level. Saunders (1941), Cook (1941), Coffield (1952), and Goodlad (1954) all report basically the same finding: that non-promotion has no significant effects on the range of specific abilities within the classroom.

The next reason relates to the threat of non-promotion as a motivating factor for students. Otto and Melby (1935) put this to the test with second and fifth grade students. They concluded that the children who were told at the beginning of a semester that all will be in the following grade the next term, do as well on a comprehensive achievement test as children who throughout the semester are reminded that they must do good work or suffer non-promotion. Mallinson (1954) found that motivation of non-promoted children actually suffered and maladustment was

more common after non-promotion than before. Cotter (1964) concurs that the anxiety produced by fear of failure interferes with intellectual functioning, thereby causing more failure. Findings by Reiter (1973) and Walker (1973) are consistent with these results.

The third reason for retaining a child concerns the effects of non-promotion on achievement. Design Type II studies done by Mateer (1956), Brundage (1956), Lobdell (1954), Templin (1940), Frances (1939), and Stringer (1958) have presented evidence illustrating the benefits to pupil achievement from non-promotion. Lobdell, for example, found that when specific and individualized criteria were carefully used to select children who were to repeat a grade, almost 70% of them made noticeable gains in achievement. These circumstances are, however, not representative of the normal procedures for retention. Further, there were no comparison groups in these studies; hence, as was pointed out earlier, there is no indication for how well these children might have done, had they been promoted.

In an effort to introduce some comparisons, Design Type I studies were conducted. Once the comparison group was introduced, the results began to show that no benefits for retention were evident. Arthur (1936) equated a group of non-promoted first graders with a promoted group on the basis of mental age and found that the former gained no more in reading over a 2-year period than did the latter. Similar findings were made by Coffield and Blommer (1956) when they measured, at 1 and 2-year intervals, the achievement of pupils who had been promoted and non-promoted in grades 3 to 6. Achievement was also assessed at the time when all the non-promoted pupils were in seventh grade. They, too, found that children who repeat a grade and those who are promoted ultimately perform at about the same level when their performance is measured in a higher grade. Wallihan's (1955) and Hall's and Demarast's (1958) findings were commensurate with these results.

In a more recent study of first graders, Wright (1979), too, found no significant differences between the two groups in third grade when age was controlled. Ammons (1975) concurs with these conclusions.

Some studies actually showed that retention had negative effects on achievement. A study by Worth (1960) revealed that in two well-matched groups, the low achievers who were retained appeared to make no greater gains, and often less, in achievement than similar pupils who were promoted. Dobbs and Neville (1967) studied 30 pairs of first graders, each pair consisting of a once retained first grader and a never retained second grader. The pairs were matched on variables such as sex, socioeconomic level, type of classroom assignment, age, mental ability and reading achievement. Results indicated that promotion leads to the increased achievement of the promoted group. Furthermore, "...non-promotion was actually a disadvantage to achievement" (Dobb & Neville, 1967, p. 474).

Reiter (1973), Walker (1973) and Bocks (1977) concluded in their review that retaining a student as a device to enhance greater mastery of elementary school subject matter does not receive support from these research findings.

The final rationale to support the use of non-promotion concerns the problem of social immaturity and emotional adjustment. Many studies have found that grade retention damages social and emotional development of the retained student. Studies by Anfison (1941), Sandin (1944) and Goodlad (1954) indicated that regularly promoted students were significantly better in their personal and social adjustment. Sandin (1944) found that retained children, on the average, are likely to choose companions in grades ahead of them. Goodlad (1954) concurs that promoted children were rejected significantly less by classmates as persons not desirable as friends. Morrison and Perry (1956) and Worth (1960) reached similar conclusions about popularity.

In a more recent study, White and Howard (1973) concluded that failure to be promoted can have negative effects on self-concept. Walker (1973) and Bocks (1977) agree that poor self-concept and problems in motivation may be linked with low achievement and that this may be aggravated by retention. It should be pointed out that these results may be interpreted in light of the subjectivity and limited reliability of self-concept measures.

A somewhat different conclusion was reported in studies by Cooper (1980), Ammons (1975), and Anderson (1957). They found that there was no significant difference between matched groups of retained and promoted groups on measures of self-concept and social adjustment. It is significant that no Type I studies could be found to support the notion that retention enhances social or emotional adjustment.

Although it is not conclusive that retention has deleterious effects on self-concept, the research clearly indicates that grade retention does not benefit or enhance social and emotional development.

It is evident that research does not support the four major reasons for retaining a child in a given grade. Jackson (1975) concludes:

> There is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties...Thus, those educators who retain pupils in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such treatment will provide greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than will promotion to the next grade. (p. 627)

Reiter (1973), Bocks (1977) and Hess (1978) concur with this conclusion.

Developmental Readiness As an Alternative to Non-Promotion

If retention is ineffective in enhancing grade level performance, is there an alternative to this practice? A major problem with grade retention is that it is an intervention strategy that is implemented after the fact. Further, even mandatory promotion has not been shown to alleviate academic difficulties. The child has already experienced the frustration and degradation of not being able to compete. Proponents of developmental readiness programs, like Arnold Gesell (1928), believe that the time to intervene for failure is before it happens. Intervention, according to Gesell, relates to placing children in learning situations based on their developmental readiness rather than chronological age. It is Gesell's position that through proper school placement, 50% of school failures can be remedied or prevented (Ilg, Ames, Haines & Gillespie, 1978). Although Gesell does advocate grade retention as a possible intervention, he believes that this would be unnecessary if children were not forced to begin first grade before they were developmentally ready. The assumption that all children are ready to read at age 6 is inaccurate. Ames, et al., (1979) outline the basic stages of motor, perceptual and language development. Although all children progress through these stages, they do so at different rates. A child must master certain concepts and skills in each of these areas before he/she can successfully attempt the complex task of reading. Teaching a child at his/her developmental level is a way of preventing unnecessary failure. Children should be placed in first grade based on their behavioral age rather than their chronological age (Ilg & Ames, 1964).

Carll and Richard (1971) in their Practical Guide to School Readiness discuss what they term "The Developmental Point of View." Basically, this point of view centers on understanding that growth is orderly, structured and predictable, while respecting that children have their own rate and pattern growth particular to them. It further means accepting children as a total action system with their physical, social, emotional and

intellectual components depending upon and supporting each other. Carll and Richard, like Gesell, believe that readiness for any given task has its roots in the biological-maturational makeup of the child and promote educational programs for children in terms of "development as it *IS, NOW*, not in terms of what one thinks it ought to be" (p. 3).

"Overplacement" is viewed by developmentalists as one of the major causes of school failure (Carll & Richard, 1971; Ilg & Ames, 1965). "Overplacement" means that a child is "in over his/her head." His grade level imposes pressures which inhibit growth in some area, whether it be social, physical well-being, emotional stability, or academic learning. Overplacement can manifest itself in different ways, depending upon the developmental area being stressed. But in all cases, the overplaced child is frustrated and this frustration can manifest itself in covert forms such as avoidance and passive resistance or overt forms relating to emotional disturbances, learning disabilities or lack of discipline. "The point is- when we place a child in a situation for which he is not ready, we inhibit his chances of becoming the whole person he was meant to be" (Carll & Richard, 1971, p. 7).

Carll and Richard (1971) advocate a pre-first grade or transitional program for children who are developmentally not ready to successfully accomplish first grade tasks. There are basically three major goals or components of this program: (a) Time to grow and develop at one's own pace, (b) Experience through which one can make discoveries about the world and about oneself, and (c) Acceptance without condition- respect for the uniqueness of the human being and concentration on the positive abilities already developed as well as those that are emerging.

In order for a pre-first grade program to be viable, educators must be able to predict in some systematic way which children are not developmentally ready to begin first grade. A diagnostic interview consisting of a series of tasks relating to different developmental levels have been designed to predict readiness.

Ilg and Ames (1964) found that correspondence between predictions based on the developmental examination at the onset of the school year and the teacher's ratings at the end of that year were reasonably high (83%) for kindergarten subjects. With minor exceptions, this agreement decreased with added age and higher grade placement. However, at all grade levels (K, 1 and 2), agreement between the developmental rating and teacher's judgment was very close for the fully ready and the fully unready children. The major area of disagreement was that group of children rated by the examination as questionable. Correlation between the original kindergarten predictions and the actual school performance of these children as judged by the school placement six years later showed a correlation of. 74 between the prediction of readiness and grade placement.

Ilg, et al., (1978) cites examples of schools throughout the United States that have implemented a developmental placement program. Although the type of program can vary from school to school, basically all kindergarten children are screened to determine the child's level of readiness skills. Pre-first grade programs are provided for those children assessed as being not ready for regular first grade. In Garden Grove, California, at the Genevieve M. Crosby School, 65% of the 1966-67 first graders were reading below grade level. The next year, children entering first grade were developmentally placed. The incidence of children reading below grade level dropped to 8% after this program was implemented (Ilg, et al., 1978). However, the time frame of when the developmental group's reading ability was assessed was not provided by this report.

Unpublished research from Visalia, California, has shown that through developmental placement, a school can sharply reduce the number of children who need remedial help. In one primary school of 500 children, before developmental placement was undertaken, there were 58 referrals outside the school for special help in one year. The next year, with developmental placement, there were only eight such referrals (Ilg, et al., 1979).

Additional research is needed in the area of developmental programs in public schools to assess its impact on academic progress. However, the examples cited suggest that pre-first grade programs may be beneficial.

The transitional first grade program in Hillsborough County has been implemented as a preventive program for first grade retention. The child is still spending two years in first grade. However, with the transitional program, the child is not put in a position where he/she has to fail to receive help. Children who are diagnosed as not having the readiness skills to begin first grade are placed in transition to develop those necessary skills. This type of pre-first grade program may be that alternative needed to provide a more successful academic experience in the primary grades. Before such programs can be advocated, information is needed to determine if the time spent in transition would be any more effective than simply repeating the first grade.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This section will outline the research design used in this investigation, sampling procedures, instrumentation and data analysis techniques.

Design of Study

The design for this study was an ex post facto comparison of two groups. Transition repeaters were compared to non-transition repeaters at the end of their second first grade year on CTBS reading and language scaled scores and on their reading level in the Holt series. Both groups had spent two years in some type of first grade unit. Below is a chronological representation of each group.

YEARS	GROUP 1	GROUP 2
1980 - 1981	Transitional First Grade Year	Regular First Grade Year
1981 - 1982	Regular First Grade Year	Repeated First Grade Year

Data Gathering

Group 1, the transition repeaters, was selected from three schools in Hillsborough County which offer the transitional first grade curriculum. Each of the three transition schools was systematically matched with a non-transition elementary school in Hillsborough County on the following three criteria: (a) CTBS first grade equivalent scores for 1981 in reading, language and total battery, (b) percentage of students in the bottom quartile of the CTBS in reading and language, and (c) national percentile ranks for each school in 1981 for reading and language.

After the three non-transition schools had been identified through this matching process, Group 2, the non-transition repeaters, were selected. Each transitional repeater (N = 38) in the three transition schools was matched on four variables with a non-transitional repeater (N = 60) in the selected non-transition schools. Students were matched on (a) reading and language stanines and on Total Battery scaled scores on the level A Form S CTBS taken at the end of kindergarten, Spring 1980, (b) sex, (c) race, (d) socioeconomic status, (e) PREP strategy, and (f) kindergarten experience. Matching procedures were conducted in the following sequence. Students were first matched on sex, race, SES, kindergarten experience and PREP strategy. All students in the study had attended a full year of private or public kindergarten. Next, the students were matched on total reading and language stanines and on total battery scaled scores within 10 points. This matching procedure resulted in 20 pairs, each containing a transition and a non-transition student.

In essence, groups were matched on 1980 information provided for spring of the kindergarten year and fall of the first grade year. Comparisons were done after the second first grade year on Spring 1982 CTBS Total Reading, Total Language and Total Battery scores, Level B Form S and on the Spring 1982 reading level in the Holt series. In addition, students were rated by teachers in Spring 1982 to determine the teachers' assessment of subjects' reading ability and readiness for second grade.

The close matching of schools and students in this design represents an effort to exert some control over extraneous variables in order to minimize threats to internal validity. The constraints of ex post facto research, however, do increase the possibility of rival hypotheses. One such constraint relates to the fact that random selection and assignment of subjects was not possible and the selection of students to participate in transition classes, as well as the program itself, could not be supervised by the researchers. In addition, the decision as to which students would be placed in transition (in transitional

schools) and which students would be retained (in non-transitional schools) was made at different points in the school year. Results of such research must be interpreted in light of these compromises.

The populations used in this study have been described by the stratification variables for matching schools and students. Any findings can be validly generalized as indicative of the members of this population and any population with similar characteristics and treatment circumstances.

In order to better understand the treatment in this study, the following description is provided.

The Transitional Program

The treatment variable in this study was placement in the transitional first grade program. Interviews were conducted with the supervisor of the program along with personnel from each of the three transitional schools to ascertain: (a) procedures and criteria for placement in the transitional program, (b) goals and description of the transitional program, and (c) how transition differs from the regular first grade program. The results of these interviews will now be summarized.

The decision to place a student in the transitional program was made at the end of kindergarten or within the initial few weeks of the first grade year. Consideration for this program was recommended by the kindergarten or first grade teacher along with the primary diagnosticians in the school. Students were considered for the program if they were experiencing difficulty in mastering basic readiness skills or evidenced delays in language development, motor skills and/or social development. They were identified as not possessing the basic prerequisite skills to successfully perform the reading and mathematical tasks as well as the behavioral expectations necessary for adequate completion of the first grade year. This lack of

readiness to begin first grade tasks made these students high-risk for first grade retention. Transitional school personnel indicated that these students, prior to the institution of the transitional units, were placed in first grade with full knowledge that they would need to be retained. The high percentage of first graders with these difficulties led to the creation of the transitional program in these schools.

The goals of the transitional program were basically to provide extended readiness experience in academic areas as well as an emphasis on language, motor and social development. The program concentrated on acquisition of academic and behavioral skills necessary for a successful first grade experience. It was emphasized that transition was not merely an extension of the kindergarten curriculum. Students were trained, in a gradual sequence, to do such things as: sit at desks for increasing periods of time, work independently without teacher's assistance, listen to and follow complex directions, and copy from the board. These skills, along with others, were not taught in kindergarten but were expected very early in the first grade year.

In the area of reading, much time was spent on enhancing visual and auditory discrimination of letters and sounds, letter-sound associations, and other reading readiness skills. As mentioned earlier, there was a heavy emphasis placed on language development. The Language Experience in Reading (LEIR) program was used for both reading and language curriculums. Students spend the majority of the year in experimental activities which they talk, write and ultimately read about. Sight-word vocabulary and story reading were built through the LEIR program. The formal reading series (Holt), if used at all, was generally presented much later in the transitional year. Contrastingly, in regular first grade classes, students were placed in the Holt series within the first month of the school year.

In addition to the LEIR program, the Peabody Language Kits were used in all transitional classes. This program emphasized language skills needed to master school-like tasks.

Transitional classes were generally smaller in size with approximately 15 students, allowing a lower pupil-teacher ratio and more one-to-one attention. Along with the teacher, there was usually a volunteer or part-time aide in each transition class. This reduced ratio allows for the high use of manipulative materials in small group and individual settings. The math series, in the transition class, was the Developmental Math Program (DMP) which provides manipulatives and hands-on experience in teaching every math concept. Regular first grade used a math workbook with limited opportunity to experience a manipulative curriculum. In reading, math and language, the transitional child learned through direct experience with the world. The abstracts in these subject areas were built upon a base of concrete experiences.

The teacher was a critical feature in the transition unit. Teachers were placed in the class on a voluntary basis and were reported as having a high level of commitment to the program. It was pointed out that the transition teacher and student were under less pressure than in the regular first grade. Regular first grade teachers were responsible for taking their students through a full and admittedly vigorous curriculum in one year, whereas the transition teacher was preparing his/her students for that curriculum.

The curriculum in the transitional and first grade programs were different. A student going through transition would move into first grade with his peers to experience a new setting, a new teacher, and a new program. First grade repeaters, in contrast, were aware that their peers were moving forward while they must return to the same grade and experience the same curriculum. The message of failure was much more evident to the repeater than to the transitional student who was maintaining an upward progression.

It should be noted that there was flexibility for moving in and out of the transitional class. Should a student display the skills necessary to achieve in a regular first grade setting, he/she may be mainstreamed or placed in the first grade program. Although

this happens on occasion, these children were more the exception than the rule.

The following chart has been constructed to outline the major differences between the transitional and the regular first grade program as seen by the project staff. The chart is a compilation of information obtained from the supervisor of early childhood as well as principals and staff members in the transition and non-transition schools.

Characteristic	TRANSITIONAL	REGULAR FIRST GRADE
1. Pupil-Teacher Ratio.	Reduced ratio - - approximately 15 students with a teacher and an aide.	Higher ratio - - generally on teacher to 25 students.
2. Instruction	Increased small group (2-3 students) and one-to-one instruction.	Larger groups, more whole group instruction and less opportunity for one-to-one instruction.
3. Reading Program	Extended time in readiness skills. Experience based LIER program. No formal reading books used until late in the year.	Limited readiness instruction. Placed in Holt Reading Series within first month of school. Expected to complete 7 readers to meet criteria for second grade.
4. Math Program	DMP Program. All concepts taught through manipulative and experiential tasks.	More workbook and paper/pencil tasks. Less use of manipulatives.
5. Language Program	Heavy emphasis on language development through LEIR and Peabody programs.	Language development covered through reading and language arts curriculum. Less emphasis.
6. Behavioral Expectations	Time spent to gradually train school behaviors such as sitting in desk, working independently, etc.	Conformity expected within first month of school in order to proceed to academic requirements.
7. Retention	Students move on with peers to a totally different setting and curriculum in first grade.	Students are left behind peers and repeat the same curriculum in the same setting.

Instrumentation

In order to determine the confidence with which test data can be interpreted, technical information on the assessment instruments is necessary. The CTBS, published by CTB/McGraw-Hill, has been used in Hillsborough County since 1975. As reported in Buros' Seventh Mental Measurement Yearbook (1972), the CTBS, from a technical point of view, is a model of good test construction. Detailed information was provided in the Technical Bulletin on test development and content validity. Norms were based upon an exceedingly large standardization sample of representative students throughout the 50 states. Kuder-Richardson 20 reliability coefficients on level A and B for reading, language and total battery range from (.88) to (.97) with standard errors of measurement for reading (3.54), language (2.15) and total battery (5.36). Interform reliability coefficients, a more rigorous evaluation, tend to be near (.80).

Data Analysis

The null hypothesis in this design was that the median difference in reading and language scores on the CTBS and the median difference in reading level in the Holt series would be zero. The alternate hypothesis was that the median difference in reading and language scores on the CTBS and the median difference in reading level in the Holt series would be significantly greater for Group 1 as compared with Group 2. A two-tailed test was used with significance levels set at the $\leq .05$ alpha level.

In order to determine the most appropriate method of data analysis, several parametric and nonparametric tests were examined. Parametric statistics were eliminated because the nature of the present research design violated these basic underlying assumptions: (a) randomization, (b) homoscedasticity, and (c) normally distributed population. Because the validity of the findings from a parametric test become questionable when these assumptions are threatened, a nonparametric statistic was selected.

The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test is a nonparametric statistic which tests whether two related samples are significantly different. In using this test, one can make the judgment of "greater than" between any two pairs' performance and also can make the determination between any two difference scores arising from any two pairs. This test was used to determine if there is a significant difference between each matched pair in Group 1 and 2 and whether the median difference scores for the groups differ significantly. Since the data was continuous and was at least of ordinal level, the assumptions of the Wilcoxon were satisfied. The Wilcoxon is one of the most powerful of the nonparametric tests, and it is a most useful alternative to the parametric t test when the researcher wishes to avoid the t test's assumptions (Downie & Starry, 1977). Even if the Wilcoxon test is applied to data which might properly be analyzed by the most powerful parametric test, the t test, its power-efficiency approaches 95.5% as N increases (Mood, 1954) and is close to 95% even for moderate-sized samples (Downie & Starry, 1977; Siegal, 1956).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in the following manner:

1. Discussion of matching procedure and description of sample.
2. Comparison of CTBS Total Reading, Total Language and Total Battery Scores of transitional versus non-transitional students.
3. Comparison of Holt Reading levels of transitional and non-transitional students.
4. Comparison of Descriptive Data related to each group's reading ability and readiness for second grade.

Matching Procedure and Description of Sample

The three pairs of schools in this study were selected from Hillsborough County Public Schools and were systematically matched on three variables. On the first variable of CTBS grade equivalent scores for 1981, all pairs were matched within a tenth of a grade point. The second matching variable was percentage of students in the bottom quartile of the CTBS in reading and math. All pairs were matched within 5 percentage points in both the reading and math quartiles. The third variable involved matching national percentile ranks in 1981 for reading and math in each school. Each pair was matched within 10 percentile points on both reading and math (See Table 1). The matching procedure in this study resulted in three closely matched pairs, each containing a transitional and a non-transitional school. The subjects from each pair were then pooled to form two treatment groups—the transitional group and the non-transitional group.

Table 1 - Matched Variables on Schools

Pairs		CTBS Grade Equiv. Scores	% in bottom Quartile Reading	% in bottom Quartile Math	National % ile Reading	National % ile Math
Pair 1	Transition	1.7	25%	32%	42nd	37th
	Non-Transition	1.7	24%	30%	40th	39th
Pair 2	Transition	1.7	27%	22%	42nd	47th
	Non-Transition	1.7	27%	19%	44th	52nd
Pair 3	Transition	1.7	19%	25%	47th	38th
	Non-Transition	1.8	22%	20%	56th	48th

The transitional student sample originally contained a total of 38 subjects from each of the three transitional schools. Students who did not have kindergarten experience were eliminated from the sample (N = 4). In addition, 9 subjects were eliminated due to attrition.

The remaining 25 transitional students were matched from a pool of 60 non-transitional students. A total of 5 transitional students could not be matched to criteria on the variables of sex, race or CTBS scores. The remaining 20 transitional students were matched perfectly on sex, race, socioeconomic status, and PREP strategies. Socioeconomic status was determined by eligibility for the free or reduced lunch program which is based on yearly income. On the variable of CTBS total reading and language and total battery stanines, all pairs were matched within stanines and scaled scores did not vary more than nine points within any given pair.

The following demographic information about the sample in this study is provided to enhance the generalizability of the results. Of the 20 pairs of students researched, 11 pairs contained white male subjects, 5 pairs contained black male subjects, 2 pairs contained white female subjects and 2 pairs contained black female subjects. All students in the study were eligible for the free lunch program, hence from a low socioeconomic background. Additionally, all students were classified under the preventive strategy in the PREP program.

These 20 pairs of students were then compared on the following dependent variables to determine if a significant difference existed between the two groups.

Comparison of CTBS Total Reading, Total Language and Total Battery Scores

The 20 pairs consisting of a transitional and a non-transitional subject were compared on CTBS scores, Level B Form S, given in Spring of 1982. Both groups had now completed their second

first grade year; however, the transitional group had been involved in the transitional program during their first year in first grade ('80-'81 school year). It was hypothesized that transitional students would do significantly better on the CTBS due to their participation in the program.

The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test is the nonparametric statistic used to analyze the differences in the CTBS scores. On the CTBS Total Reading Scores, the ranked difference scores for the two groups needed to be ≤ 46 to be significant at the. 05 significance level. The score obtained was T = 52, indicating that there was not a significant difference between these groups on CTBS Total Reading Scores (see Table 2).

On CTBS Total Language Scores, a ranked difference of- 40 was needed to be considered significant at the. 05 level. Ranked differences of T = 52 were again obtained indicating that a significant difference did not exist between the two groups on CTBS Total Language Scores (see Table 3).

Table 2

CTBS Total Reading Scores

Pairs	Transition	Non	d	Rank of d	Rank with less frequent sign
1	263	320	-57	-12	
2	235	241	-6	-3	
3	187	251	-64	-14.5	
4	235	235	0	--	
5	295	298	-3	-1	
6	214	288	-74	-18	
7	208	253	55	-11	
8	237	269	-32	-8	
9	233	298	-65	-16	
10	253	283	-30	-6.5	
11	303	288	15	5	5
12	271	267	4	2	2
13	253	314	-61	-13	
14	291	253	38	9	9
15	266	273	-7	-4	
16	266	308	-42	-10	
17	259	148	111	19	19
18	194	258	-64	-14.5	
19	239	269	-30	-6.5	
20	314	245	70	17	17

T = 52

N = 19

Significance Level .05 46

Table 3

CTBS Total Language Scores

Pairs	Transition	Non	d	Rank of d	Rank with less frequent sign
1	242	264	-22	-5	
2	264	247	17	4	4
3	193	258	-65	-14	
4	224	258	-34	-7	
5	346	286	60	11	11
6	217	278	-61	-12.5	
7	236	297	-61	-12.5	
8	327	326	1	1	1
9	164	286	-122	-17	
10	224	326	-102	-16	
11	326	286	40	9	9
12	310	297	13	2	2
13	247	286	-39	-8	
14	286	217	69	15	15
15	278	278	0	- -	
16	264	264	0	- -	
17	230	184	46	10	10
18	230	369	-139	-18	
19	247	270	-23	-6	
20	310	326	-16	-3	

T = 52

N = 18

Significance Level .05 < 40

On CTBS Total Battery scores, similar results were obtained. A rank difference score of < 52 was needed to indicate that a significant difference existed between the two groups on this variable. An obtained rank difference score of 71.5 indicated that again the scores of the two groups were not statistically significant (See Table 4).

Comparison of Holt Reading Levels

A memo was sent to each of the six schools involved in the study asking teachers to provide several items of information on each student (See Appendix). One item centered on reporting the Holt Reading Level for each subject. Since this is ordinal level data, the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test was again appropriate for use in analyzing the differences in levels. A rank difference score of < 25 was needed to indicate that a signiicant difference at the. 05 level existed. The obtained difference score of 34.5 indicates that there is not a significant difference in Holt Reading Levels in Spring 1982 between transitional and non-transitional students (See Table 5).

Table 4

CTBS Total Battery Scores

Pairs	Transition	Non	d	Rank of d	Rank with less frequent sign
1	204	235	-31	-5	
2	216	182	34	6	6
3	193	198	-35	-7.5	
4	162	210	-48	-12	
5	288	242	46	11	11
6	140	230	-90	-19	
7	160	229	-69	-15	
8	214	236	-22	-3	
9	165	260	-95	-20	
10	183	224	-41	-10	
11	279	244	35	7.5	7.5
12	229	237	-8	-2	
13	214	266	-52	-13	
14	241	185	56	14	14
15	212	213	-1	-1	
16	220	260	-40	-9	
17	197	115	82	17	17
18	142	228	-86	-18	
19	201	231	-30	-4	
20	276	204	72	1616	

T = 71.5

N = 20

Significance Level .05 < 52

Table 5

Holt Reading Levels

Pairs	Transition	Non	d	Rank	Rank with less frequent sign
1	7	8	-1	-4.5	
2	4	8	-4	-12.5	
3	6	6	0	- -	
4	8	6	2	10	10
5	8	8	8	0	- -
6	3	8	-5	-14.5	
7	5	7	-2	-10	
8	7	8	-1	-4.5	
9	8	9	-1	-4.5	
10	8	8	0	- -	
11	- -	- -	- -	- -	
12	4	8	-4	-12.5	
13	7	8	-1	-4.5	
14	7	8	-1	-4.5	
15	8	6	2	10	10
16	7	8	-1	-4.5	
17	8	3	5	14.5	14.5
18	- -	- -	- -	- -	
19	7	8	-1	-4.5	
20	8	9	-1	-4.5	

T = 34.5

N = 18

Significance Level .05 < 25

Comparative of Descriptive Data Related to Reading Ability and Readiness for Second Grade

Information for these comparisons could only be obtained on 18 out of the 20 pairs of subjects. Teachers were asked to rate each student's reading ability according to a 5-point scale as follows: 1—Superior, 2—Above Average, 3—Average, 4—Below Average, 5—Way Below Average (See Appendix for Questionnaire). The Wilcoxon was again used since the requirement of ordinal level data is satisfied. A rank difference of < 8 was required to show a significant difference in teacher assessments of Reading Ability. The obtained rank difference of 10.5 indicates that there is not a significant difference on this variable (See Table 6).

Readiness for second grade was determined by the teacher using a 3-point scale as follows: 1—Ready, 2—Unsure, 3—Not Ready (See Appendix). Since it was questionable whether this would truly be ordinal level data, a statistical analysis was not conducted on this information. Instead, it will be reported descriptively. In the transitional group, 11 out of 18 students (61%) were assessed as being ready for second grade. In this group, 7 out of 18 (38%) were reported as not being ready to begin second grade. For the non-transitional group, teachers reported that 13 out of 18 students (72%) were ready for second grade, while 5 out of 18 students (28%) were not. Although there is a slight difference favoring the non-transitional students, again this data would indicate that a significant difference did not exist in teachers' assessment of readiness for second grade between transitional and non-transitional students.

Table 6

Holt Reading Levels

Pairs	Transition	Non	d	Rank	Rank with less frequent sign
1	3	3	0	- -	
2	4	4	0	- -	
3	4	4	0	- -	
4	4	4	0	- -	
5	3	3	0	- -	
6	5	2	3	10	
7	5	3	2	7.5	
8	4	3	1	3	
9	3	2	1	3	
10	3	3	0	- -	
11	- -	- -	- -	- -	
12	4	3	1	3	
13	4	2	2	7.5	
14	4	4	0	- -	
15	3	5	-2	-7.5	-7.5
16	4	3	1	3	
17	4	5	-1	-3	-3
18	- -	- -	- -	- -	
19	4	2	2	7.5	
20	3	3	0	-	

T = -10.5
N = 10
.05 < 8

Scale
1 - Superior
2 - Above Average
3 - Average

Significance Level
4 - Below Average
5 - Way Below Average

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether participation in a pre-first grade transitional program would be more effective than grade repetition in enhancing first grade readiness. Specifically, reading and language achievement and teachers' perceptions of students' ability and grade readiness were examined. It was hypothesized that those students who were assessed as not ready for the first grade curriculum and were exposed to the transitional program prior to first grade would do significantly better in developing reading and language skills than those who were placed in first grade, ready or not, and consequently were forced to repeat. Results indicated, however, that there was no significant difference between transitional and non-transitional subjects on any of the independent variables measured.

Performance on the CTBS and in the Holt Reading Series was used to assess reading achievement in both groups. No significant difference was found between transitional and non-transitional students on either variable. The CTBS was also used to measure language development in the two groups. Commensurate with the reading scores, no significant difference was found in language abilities as measured by this group-administered instrument. Informal rating scales were distributed to the teachers of both the transitional and non-transitional students. Teachers were asked to rate (a) each child's reading ability and (b) respective readiness for the second grade curriculum. Again, no significant differences were evidenced between the two groups.

The major drawback in conducting ex post facto research was the increased possibility of confounding variables which would affect gathered data (Kerlinger, 1979). When interpreting such research, the influences of these variables must be considered. Oftentimes, in ex post facto research, the independent variable

cannot be manipulated. In this study, the independent variable was participation in the transition program. This program wsa already intact and implemented and hence could not be controlled or supervised by this experimenter. Consequently, close monitoring of the execution of this curriculum was not possible. However, supervisors of the early childhood programs, as well as the school based staff and principals in each of the schools involved, were interviewed to obtain a detailed description and verification of how the transitional classes were conducted. All indications support the authenticity of the developmental program employed in all three transitional schools.

Another uncontrolled variable in this study relates to the selection of students for the transitional program. Students placed in this program should have evidenced a lack of readiness due to developmental delays as opposed to severe intellectual deficits or emotionality. Each school was primarily responsible for identification of candidates for the transitional program, under the supervision of a team of diagnosticians. Due to the nature of ex post facto research, this selection process could not be uniformly supervised by researchers participating in this study. But, again, descriptions of the criteria used for identifying students as well as the selection process itself were obtained from program supervisors and school personnel. It would appear from these reports that the criteria for selection utilized were appropriate and acceptable.

In this study, random selection and assignment of subjects was not plausible. Close matching of transitional and non-transitional schools as well as careful matching of subjects was conducted in an effort to establish comparability between the two groups. Aside from demographic information, only group data was available for matching subjects on ability and achievement. It is possible that the groups differed systematically on critical variables such as intelligence and severity of academic difficulties. It is important to note, however, that pairs were matched on significant variables such

as SES, race and group data in an effort to hold some of these extraneous factors constant. The literature suggests that these aforementioned variables strongly relate to academic achievement (Sattler, 1982).

Another consideration is the fact that students were chosen for the two treatment groups at different points in the school year. Transitional subjects were identified prior to extensive participation in the first grade curriculum. They were placed in the transitional program at the end of kindergarten or beginning of first grade. Non-transitional students, however, completed most of the first grade year before formally being identified as retainees. The fact that the transitional subjects were those students who teachers predicted would fail first grade while the non-transitional students actually completed and failed the first grade year may have introduced some systematic differences between the two groups. It should be noted, however, that according to the primary diagnosticians, the transitional students made up a significant portion of the retained population prior to the institution of the transitional program.

The limitations of ex post facto research may have been a possible contributor to the outcomes in this study. Another explanation, however, might be that a transitional program truly does not enhance school development. A strictly biological/maturational perspective negates the importance of environmental factors on readiness. Gesell (1928), in many of his writings, advocates the position of simply holding children out of school until they are developmentally ready to deal with the curriculum. Perhaps the school program is insignificant until the child biologically matures to the necessary point of readiness. However, it is important to note that Gesell also acknowledges that while enrichment programs may not help children, failure experiences can, in many cases, hinder them (Ames et al., 1979).

To this point, consideration has been given to confounding variables which may have obscured significant differences in the

obtained data as well as the possibility that participation in the transitional program had no significant benefits. Another area of reasoning relates to the possibility that important differences may have existed between the two groups but were not demonstrated due to (a) lack of adequate sensitivity in evaluation instruments, (b) too early of a follow-up, (c) significant differences existing in variables not measured, and (d) interpretation of what constitutes a significant difference. These possibilities will now be considered.

Matching of students as well as evaluation of reading and language performance in this study relied heavily upon the use of data obtained through group testing. Several extraneous variables such as motivation, attention and physical and emotional well-being can significantly affect test performance, particularly in a group situation where the examiner is not able to closely observe each subject (Sattler, 1982). Group testing of young children is considerably more difficult due to the shorter attention spans and awareness of test importance present in most kindergarten and first grade youngsters (Burns, 1978). More intense and individualized assessment of student reading and language achievement may have revealed significant differences which were not detected by the group testing. In addition, a limited number of items are administered to assess a wide variety of skills on the CTBS. An individualized instrument with more items as well as finer gradations in level could have provided a more comprehensive view of the subjects' abilities.

The second consideration is that perhaps a one-year follow-up was too soon to demonstrate the benefits of the program. Oftentimes, longitudinal studies are necessary in order to determine the significant effects of school programs and placements. However, longitudinal studies are extremely difficult due to the time constraints often present in research as well as the problems of attrition (Jackson, 1975). At any rate, it is possible that the positive effects of participation in the transitional program could manifest themselves later in the subject's school career.

Academic achievement, more specifically reading ability, was the only variable extensively examined in this study. The third consideration in interpreting the outcomes of this research relates to the possibility that differences occurred in areas not assessed. One of the major differences between participation in a transitional program as opposed to first grade retention deals with the concept of failure. Students participating in transition maintain a forward progression without the experience of not being able to compete and consequently failing the grade. First grade repeaters, on the other hand, are faced with the realization that they are not meeting required criteria and this is verified by their having to experience the same curriculum a second time. School adjustment and self-concept, however, were not assessed in these subjects.

Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the effects of school failure on self-concept. One such study concluded that the process of schooling tends to develop a self-concept of personal inadequacy in many students (Yamomoto, Thomas, & Karnes, 1969). Glasser (1979) found that failure experiences in school have a tremendous impact upon the self-concept of, particularly, the elementary age student. Unlike adolescents who turn to peers for cues about what they are like as persons, elementary school age children tend to value most the opinions and evaluations about themselves held by parents, teachers, and other important adults (Brookover & Gottlieb, 1964). For this reason, failure in the early school grades can have significant adverse effects on children's perceptions of themselves. White and Howard (1973), in a study of the effect of grade retention on self-concept, supported that failure to be promoted produced negative effects upon self-concept among elementary school children

Preventing school failure by not exposing a child to tasks which are developmentally unrealistic can prevent failure experiences in the early grades (Ilg & Ames, 1978). The transitional program prevents failure while grade repetition emphasizes it. In this study, significant differences may exist in the subject's

perception of himself/herself which could strongly affect social and emotional development as well as school performance in later years.

No significant difference is generally interpreted as an indication that one treatment had no better or worse effect on a given group than another. The fourth consideration relates to this assumption. Students in the transitional program have extremely limited, if any, exposure to the objectives in a regular first grade curriculum. They are selected because they are considered to be "at risk" for failure due to a lack of developmental readiness. The transitional year is a time for enrichment and growth before being exposed to first grade tasks. Upon entering first grade, the transitional youngster is experiencing this curriculum for the first time. CTBS scores, Holt reading levels and teacher opinions all indicated that, in both groups, the majority of children had mastered prerequisite skills necessary to proceed to second grade. The transitional student, however, attained the same level of academic functioning as the first grade repeater with only one year's exposure to the curriculum. In essence, the transition students successfully accomplished in a single year what the retainees needed two years to master. It should be emphasized that the transitional subjects were those students who would most probably have failed first grade. Transition allowed them the time to grow without wasting a year in a curriculum in which they could not succeed. No significant difference, viewed from this perspective, supports the effectiveness of transition as a viable alternative to first grade repetition.

The concept of the pre-first grade transitional program continues to be adopted by many school districts throughout the country (Ilg & Ames, 1979). With the increased awareness of individual differences brought about by P.L. 94-142 and the Primary Education Program (PREP), schools are held accountable for instructing each student at his/her own level. With this current emphasis, it would appear that developmental readiness is an issue that will continue to be addressed through

educational programming. This study attempted to provide information to assess the relative effectiveness of one such program. The results are not conclusive. However, there are indications that through further research, both academic and social/emotional benefits could be evidenced. Preventing a school failure identity for young children may have pervasive effects on the total child. The challenge is to isolate these effects so that they can be systematically studied and evaluated.

Although significant benefits of a pre-first grade program could not be demonstrated in this study, the literature suggests that many of the features of the transitional curriculum in Hillsborough County Schools enhance first grade readiness. One such feature is the emphasis placed on language development and experience. With regard to reading in general, there has been considerable evidence in recent years to support a verbal-deficit hypothesis as a primary cause of reading failure (Vellutino, 1977). For this reason, it is recommended that activities geared towards oral language experience continue to be a central objective in the transitional classes. In addition, "hands-on" experience in the form of manipulatives help a child to obtain a feeling of competency in his/her environment as well as formulate a basis on which to build abstract concepts. An increased opportunity for these kinds of concrete experiences in the transitional classrooms would be advisable. Overall, the most important variable appears to be allowing the child time to grow and gradually develop necessary academic and behavioral skills in an accepting and nonstressful atmosphere (Ilg & Ames, 1965). Transitional programs should not be expected to accomplish a predetermined amount of academic material. They should instead gradually prepare the child to take on the responsibilities of the graded school environment. It is recommended that this perspective be stressed to both principals and teachers in the transitional schools.

In future research, the following recommendations might aid the experimenter in isolating and controlling significant variables for study: (a) subjects should be identified prior to beginning the

first grade year and then randomly assigned to the transitional and non-transitional groups, (b) self-concept and school adjustment should be assessed along with academic achievement, (c) follow-ups should be longitudinal, assessing subjects' development through the elementary years, and (d) more individualized evaluation techniques should be used to measure academic progress.

Continued research in this realm could potentially assist in the establishment of a truly primary intervention program aimed at the prevention, rather than the remediation, of school failure.

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APPENDIX

RETAINED STUDENTS

School _____ Page ____ of ____

Student Name	1980 - 1981 Transitional (T) non-Transitional (NT)	Reading* Ability	Readiness for 2nd Grade**	Holt or Other Reading Program Level	Assigned PREP Strategy

*Reading Ability as compared to other 1st grade students:
1. Superior 3. Average 5. Way Below Average
2. Above Average 4. Below Average

**Readiness for 2nd grade:
1. Ready
2. Not Ready
3. Somewhat unsure about readiness level